

White House Conference on Aging
May 6, 2005

Remarks - Amy Mihalyo, Director
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I'd like to discuss today what I believe to be the two of the greatest challenges and potential solutions with regards to the home delivered meal program. For 12 years I worked at an Area Agency on Aging as the Nutrition Specialist and now I am the Director of an agency that provides home delivered meals as one of our many services. The perspective I have is unique in that I now know first hand what actually works as opposed to what should work. It is with this knowledge that I believe two greatest challenges to the home delivered meal program are first funding and second recruiting, training and retaining a delivery force.

First to funding – I quickly realized that the Older American's Act funds received by this agency was woefully inadequate to meet the ever growing need for meals. To help with this, the agency contracted to provide HDMs through other funding mechanisms that allow us to make a profit, which could be used to finance more meals. This was still inadequate. To resolve our lack of funding – this agency decided to undertake a levy campaign.

Ohio is just one of 5 states that allow for a tax levy to support services for older adults. I believed that a successful levy campaign was likely because; 1. 24% of the county is over 60, 2. senior levies pass in the state 98% of the time on the first try with a 60%+ approval rating, 3. 59 counties, cities or municipalities have a senior levy. For three years I talked about a levy and a possible campaign. This was necessary to gauge the acceptance of this idea and key people's interest in working on a levy campaign. We followed these steps:

1. Began focus groups to determine community support and their views on how the money should be spent
2. Got approval from the Board of Trustees to ask the County Commissioners to put the issue on the ballot
3. Appointed a treasurer and campaign chairperson and began raising funds for the campaign
4. Campaigned through presentations to any group that would listen. Passed out sticks of gum at local high school football games.

Fortunately, the levy passed on the November 2005 ballot providing \$1.1 million yearly for senior services.

Following the election, we have meet with senior groups, social service agencies, and social service departments from the local hospitals to educate people regarding the services available. We have promised that everyone who qualifies for a meal will receive one. So far, we have not received any funds from the levy so everything is pending. I know that a levy is not possible for everyone, but for us this has allowed for an influx of funding that gives us the ability to meet the need of our county.

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Secondly – a paid delivery force.

I believe it is critical for the meal delivery to be done correctly – correct address, correct temperature maintenance, and appropriate food service sanitation it is important to have a paid delivery staff.

The training requirements as listed in the Department of Aging Nutrition Service specifications and criminal background checks can be more easily addressed if you have everyday supervisory control over employees. Additionally, consumers appreciate a familiar face on a daily basis. The drivers get to know the consumers and can intervene through notifying the office – who notifies an emergency contact person - if they detect something psychological or physiological has occurred.

Additionally, we on occasion consumers expire. It is important that drivers be fully trained and prepared if they discover a consumer expired. This training can be incorporated into their training requirements and not scare anyone off. I have been able to attract a delivery force of retired steelworkers that are not necessarily working for the money but rather for the exercise or because they believe in giving back to the community.

In conclusion, I'd like to thank you all for the opportunity to speak today about our agency's response to the home delivered meal challenges and potential solutions.